

## Special Report: The I-17 Project



*What they're doing. When it'll be done. And why they water the dirt.*

In & Out Magazine  
Sunday, February 24 2008

By Robert Roy Britt, In&Out Staff Writer

The widening of I-17 between Anthem and the Loop 101 has entered a new phase on intense construction, which means more delays for motorists and some overnight shutdowns. ADOT is asking for your patience. To ease the pain, we suggest you look forward to 2010, when the bulk of the construction will be done. Meanwhile, here's the lowdown:

- **The Carefree Interchange**
- **The Frontage Road South Out of Anthem**
- **ADOT Current Closures & Delays**

Construction will continue on I-17 between New River and the 101 interchange in four phases through 2025.

The big near-term target is 2010, when there should be one more general purpose lane in each direction from Anthem to the Carefree Highway, and a new general purpose lane plus a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in both directions from Carefree to the 101.

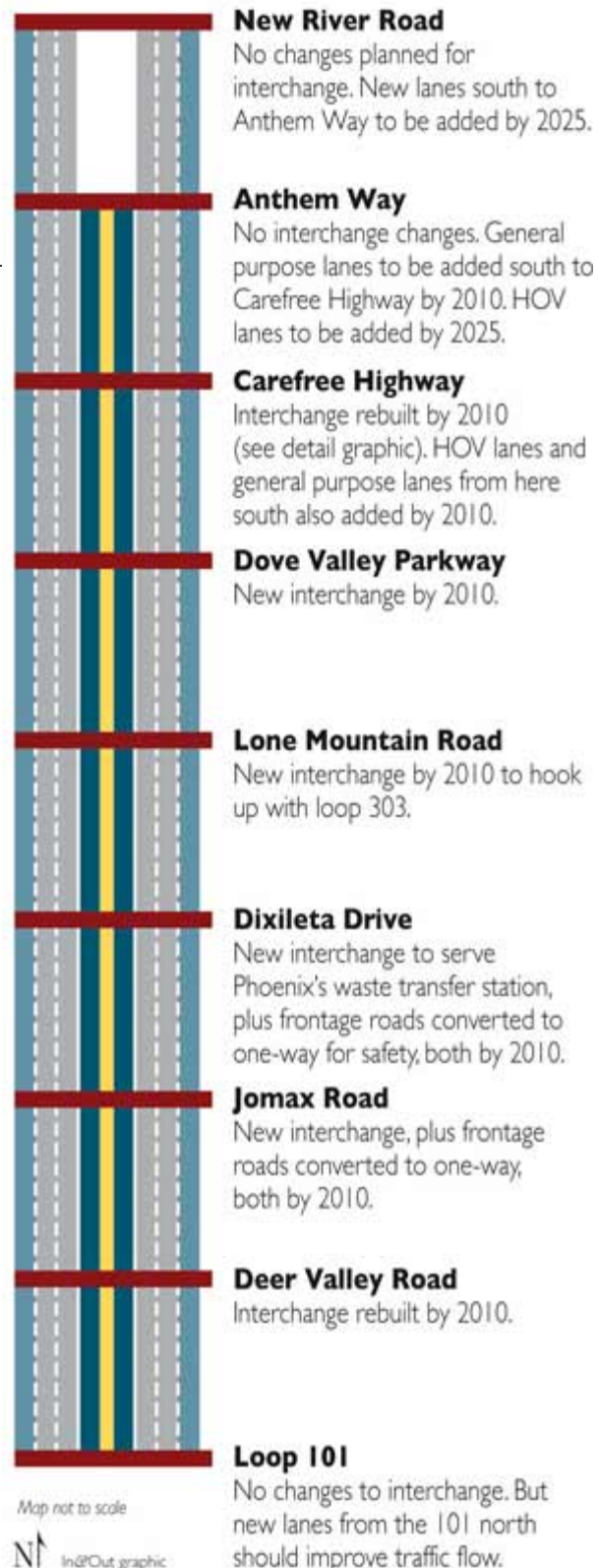
Most highway closures will occur during overnight hours.

"By and large, there will always be two lanes of free-flowing traffic in both directions," said Timothy

## The I-17 Grand Plan

What changes to expect on I-17 and the deadlines for completion:

- **New General Purpose Lanes**
- **New High-Occupancy Vehicle Lanes (HOV)**
- **Existing Lanes**
- **Concrete Barrier**





Tait, ADOT's Community Relations Project Manager.

Tait cautioned motorists to abide by the construction speed limits, however. The Department of Public Safety "will be on the hunt" for violators, he told business owners at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce at Anthem.

### **Why so late?**

In response to several questions, Tait cleared up a few myths about the project and tackled one big question that's long been on many minds: Why do officials allow places like Anthem to be built when its clear the highway system won't properly support the expected traffic?

The answer, Tait said, is simple: The Arizona Constitution gives landowners very strong rights. Agencies that issue building permits aren't authorized to stop a project based on transportation issues. The infrastructure we're now stuck with in the North Valley "is a consequence" of landowner rights, Tait said.

Okay, so why didn't ADOT plan for this sort of growth and make freeways wider in the first place? Because there is a certain amount of taxpayer money targeted for new highway construction, Tait explained.

ADOT has two basic options when it makes long-range plans: Build a few freeways and make them really wide, or build more freeways and make them only as wide as needed for the short term. The agency has long taken the latter approach, while also initially securing rights-of-way and installing adequate drainage and other basic infrastructure with a more lanes in mind for the future.

The situation could have been worse locally. Del Webb paid for the construction of Anthem's two freeway interchanges, "but they were not required to," Tait said. Presumably, just getting on the freeway could have been frustrating if only one interchange were built or if the setup had been inadequate for the traffic load. Tait cited other "island communities" in the Valley are more isolated.

Tait cited another reason for the mess: The Valley is the fastest-growing metro area in the nation, he said, so "a lot of what we are doing is without precedent." ADOT is now looking to the year 2050 in its planning, farther ahead than other metro areas, he said.

Other questions Tait answered:

**Why do you water the dirt so much?** It's not to compact the soil, as many people have theorized. It actually loosens the soil and makes it easier to dig. But the main reason is to control dust. ADOT can be fined for excess dust just like any contractor. The water is all reclaimed water, he said.

**When and where will the 303 connect?** This major loop will curve around the west side of the valley from the I-10 in Goodyear to U.S. Route 60 to I-17. A small version of the 303 will connect with I-17 in 2010 at the planned Lone Mountain Road overpass, with a wider 6-lane freeway to be built by 2017.

**Where will the Dixelela Drive overpass go?** The City of Phoenix requested it to support traffic to and from its nearby waste transfer station.

**Will there be a center barrier?** Yes, from Anthem to the 101 interchange. The concrete center barrier will look like the one already in place farther south on I-17. The entire highway will be paved from side to side, leaving no dirt in the center.

**Will the Happy Valley overpass be widened?** No. "The bridge is too narrow," Tait admits. But there are as yet no funds set aside to replace it.

**Will the southbound I-17 bottleneck at the 101 interchange improve?** Yes. The addition of lanes from the 101 northward means more lanes for through-traffic, but it should also smooth out the flow for people entering and exiting I-17 at Deer Valley or the 101.

Meanwhile, the new pavement will have to handle more cars. ADOT statistics show 51,100 cars passed the **Carefree Highway interchange** on I-17 daily in 2003. That number grew to 64,300 in 2006 and is projected to exceed 150,000 in 2021, according to Maricopa County projections. **io**

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*Photos and graphics by In&Out staff. This article is adapted from one originally published in In&Out magazine's Aug. 23-29, 2007 issue.*